

delivering two songs, *Talkin' Born Blues* and a rockin' version of that all time favourite *Ramblin' Man*. I was exhausted, the audience had hollered and danced most of the night and it has to be said, I have never seen so many smiles on people's faces as they left the hall. Hats off to Mike Trotman of Empty Rooms Promotions for a memorable night's entertainment from two of the hottest roots rock bands around today. **James Soars**

Packway Handle Band

The Cluny, Newcastle, February 3

Newcastle's Jumpin' Hot club brought the sound of bluegrass to town when they welcomed the entertaining, Athens, Georgia-based ensemble the Packway Handle Band. Opening the show was the promising Whitby singer-songwriter, Alex Kirby showing his worth as he merged his folk base with a slice or two of country fare.

The latter coming through him having heard the likes of Steve Earle. Playing solo, with only his acoustic guitar and harmonica for company, that he put to good effect on the rambling and most enjoyable *Free Talkin' Blues*, *Halfway House* and equally free spirited and jaunty *Don't Look Back*. Not too many unknown support acts get to enter and vacate the stage on a bright note, both musically and in the manner received.

Now it was the turn of the enterprising American five-piece, who, in blending slices of humour and utilising their sibling-like vocal harmonies produce music that frequently reminds the listener of the popular Old Crow Medicine Show, and likewise have the same urge to travel (musically) across boundaries and add-lib. However, there seemed to be something lacking on occasions, though to a great degree offset by their drive, humour and as already mentioned, tight harmonies. An aspect of which the boys

displayed brilliantly on *The Story and Downpour*.

Performing around two microphones the boys kept it homely and hardly stopped for breath as they delivered a fast-paced set—showing no lack in variation in tempo and material it ensured that the attention of the audience remained intact. Without a lead vocalist who was able to totally take command of the stage, the band relied on their ability as a tight unit to see the songs through. They produced among others such gems as a cover of *Home Is Where The Heart Is*, the dynamic *Great Atomic Power* and with time fast running out, the enthusiastic piece *Satan's In Space* (from their self-titled current album, PACKWAY HANDLE BAND). The same could not be said of the less than riveting traditional/folksy *Earl The Duck*, a sombre affair that became tedious, something you could not be said of their full frontal version of *Cocaine*, a song that the Old Crows likewise feature in their shows and one that both acts perform equally well, and it do get the audience going. **Maurice Hope**

Bryn Haworth

Farncombe Music Club, February 1

Slide guitarist Bryn Haworth entertained the Farncombe faithful with a selection of his wide ranging gospel blues tunes kicking off his set by asking if the crowd liked blues, he answered his own question by saying 'well it's tough if you don't'! However after the first song, *I Serve The Risen Saviour*, it was clear that it wasn't going to be too tough listening to this man play blues for an hour and a half.

Haworth warmed up his audience with Eddie Cochran's *Summertime Blues*, allowing the audience at FMC to shout the end line of the chorus whilst encouraging them to clap along to this well known rock'n'roll classic. Next up, showing the diversity and duration of his work, was *Hard Times* played to the

beat of a background drum. Following on from this Haworth performed two instrumentals *Salema* and *How Great Thou Art* wonderfully played on his silver steel guitar.

Another highlight, just before the interval, was the drum assisted *Keep the Faith*, a song about listening to the radio when he was young and how that experience has changed over time. Upbeat and catchy it set up Haworth's second half well and after the interval he kicked off with the laid back *Good Friend* followed by *Talk To Me*, a more upbeat song that allowed Haworth to demonstrate his exceptional guitar skills.

Healing On Me was another song that couldn't be more appropriate for the venue and the slow, melodic *Satisfied?* was yet another tree in the dense forest of highlights.

At this stage Haworth certainly had the audience converted to his style of music and he revealed his personal side with the reflective *Trust In Me*, a beautiful melodic song that was performed from the heart by Haworth.

If the audience weren't already being spoilt enough, Haworth certainly made them feel like it with the excellent *Everybody Wants to Get to Heaven (But Nobody Wants to Die)*. A truly fantastic contradiction wonderfully translated into music that Haworth claims leaves him wondering whether to 'laugh or cry'. He also included humour into his set between songs including stating his belief that Jesus must have come from his home county of Lancashire! Haworth also talked of his experiences with religion in a very down-to-earth honest way, relating faith to every day life in a way that the audience, although not necessarily Christian, could feel applied to them.

Although I'm sure Haworth could have played on all night (he certainly has enough material), all good things come to an end. Haworth signed off with *Let's Go Out Tonight*, a song to 'encourage people to go out to concerts like tonight'. The audience also played their part whistling along as Haworth had asked them to and at the end he was deservedly cheered off the stage by his converted audience to rapturous applause. **Greg Lewry**